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1. (original) A method of providing a visual message waiting indicator signal to an off-hook telephone, comprising the steps of:

receiving a voicemail message at a central location; and

sending a visual message waiting indicator signal from the central location and destined for the off-hook telephone.

2. (original) A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending the visual message waiting indicator signal includes the steps of:

alerting the off-hook telephone to an upcoming transmission of the visual message waiting indicator signal; and

transmitting the visual message waiting indicator signal at a time period after the alerting step.

3. (original) A method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of receiving an acknowledgement signal relating to a status of the off-hook telephone as being ready to receive the visual message waiting indicator signal prior to the transmitting step.

4. (original) A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the time period of the transmitting step is based on the acknowledgment signal.

5. (original) A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the predetermined time is associated with a muting period of the off-hook telephone.

6. (original) A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending includes transmitting caller ID data associated with a party that left the voicemail message.

7. (original) A method of receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal in an off-hook telephone, comprising the steps of:  
being in an off-hook condition; and  
receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal.

8. (original) A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of displaying a visual message waiting indicator based on the received visual message waiting indicator signal.

9. (original) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the displaying step includes displaying caller ID data associated with a messaging party.

10. (original) A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of receiving an alert signal, wherein the visual message waiting indicator signal is received at a time period after the alert signal.

11. (original) A method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the step of transmitting an acknowledgement signal in response to the alert signal.

12. (original) A method as recited in claim 11, wherein the time period is based on the acknowledgement signal.

13. (original) A telephone, comprising:  
a visual message waiting indicator; and  
an interface unit adapted to couple the telephone to a network, such that the telephone is in an off-hook condition when coupled to the network and engaged in a communication activity, and is in an on-hook condition when coupled to the network and not engaged in a communication activity,  
wherein the interface unit is adapted to receive a visual message waiting indicator signal when in the off-hook condition.

14. (original) A telephone as recited in claim 13, further comprising a muting mechanism adapted to mute a transducer in association with the receipt of the visual message waiting indicator signal.

15. (original) A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a microphone.

16. (original) A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a speaker.

17. (original) A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the muting mechanism is adapted to mute the transducer in response to an alert signal.

18. (original) A telephone switch, comprising:  
a message storage unit adapted to receive a voicemail message associated with a telephone when the telephone is in an off-hook condition; and  
a visual message waiting indicator signal transmission unit adapted to transmit a visual message waiting indicator signal to the telephone in the off-hook condition.

19. (original) A telephone switch as recited in claim 18, further comprising an alerting unit adapted to transmit an alerting signal to the telephone prior to transmitting the visual message waiting indicator signal.

20. (original) A telephone switch as recited in claim 19, further comprising an acknowledgement receiving unit adapted to receive an acknowledgement signal in response to the alerting signal and prior to transmitting the visual message waiting indicator signal.